

Message Text

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INFO AMEMBASSY SAN SALVADOR

C O N F I D E N T I A L TEGUCIGALPA 1346

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, PFOR, HO

SUBJECT: VIEWS OF ARMY CHIEF OF STAFF

BEGIN SUMMARY: LT. COLONEL CESAR ELVIR SIERRA, ARMY CHIEF OF STAFF, TOLD POLOFF THAT RECENT TALKS WITH SALVADORAN LEADERS HAD BEEN USEFUL AND HAD INVOLVED DISCUSSION ON THE BASIC PROBLEM OF DISPUTED FRONTIER AREAS. HE SAID THAT THE MOST IMPORTANT INITIAL TASK OF THE NEWLY-FORMED ADVISORY COUNCIL WILL BE TO DEVELOP AN ELECTORAL LAW FOR THE PROJECTED 1979 ELECTIONS. HE EMPHASIZED THAT THE DECISION TO STRENGTHEN THE AIR FORCE WAS MADE IN THE HOPE OF DETERRING A POSSIBLE ATTACK RATHER THAN AS A THREAT TO OTHER COUNTRIES. END SUMMARY.

1. POLOFF CALLED ON ARMY CHIEF OF STAFF, LT. COLONEL CESAR ELVIR SIERRA, ON MARCH 9. ELVIR REMARKED THAT HE HAD ACCOMPANIED FOREIGN MINISTER PERDOMO TO THE RECENT MEETING WITH SALVADORAN FOREIGN MINISTER BORGONOVO IN MIAMI AND CHIEF OF STATE MELGAR TO HIS MEETING WITH PRESIDENT MOLINA OF EL SALVADOR AT EL POY. HE COMMENTED THAT EL SALVADOR IS MAINLY INTERESTED IN THE ECONOMIC BENEFITS TO BE DERIVED FROM A SETTLEMENT (TRANSIT, MIGRATION) WHILE HONDURAS IS INTERESTED IN A SETTLEMENT FROM A POLITICAL VIEWPOINT; THAT IS, A FINAL DEMARCATION OF

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THE FRONTIER. HE SAID THAT THE TWO SIDES ARE STARTING

TO DISCUSS THE BASIC PROBLEM INVOLVING THE DISPUTED FRONTIER AREAS. ELVIR OBSERVED THAT, IN REALITY, THERE ARE ONLY THREE AREAS OF THE FRONTIER WHERE THERE IS FUNDAMENTAL DISAGREEMENT, BUT NOTED THAT THE BASIC PROBLEM IS HOW TO RESOLVE THOSE PARTICULAR BOLSONES (POCKETS). HE SAID THAT THEY HAVE BEEN CONSIDERING THE POSSIBILITY OF A THIRD PARTY OFFERING THE BASIS FOR A SETTLEMENT TO THE TWO COUNTRIES; HE POINTED OUT THAT THERE ARE MANY POSSIBILITIES IN THE SELECTION OF A THIRD PARTY INVOLVING A COUNTRY, A GROUP OF COUNTRIES OR INTERNATIONAL JUDGES. HE SAID THAT THE NEXT BILATERAL MEETING MAY BE HELD IN THE NEAR FUTURE IN MEXICO.

2. ELVIR COMMENTED THAT THE HIGH LEVEL COMMISSION HAD COMPLETED ITS WORK ON THE TRATADO MARCO AND WOULD BE PRESENTING THE REPORT TO THE CENTRAL AMERICAN CHIEFS OF STATE PRIOR TO THE NEXT QUADRIpartite MEETING. HE SAID THE HONDURAN GOVERNMENT HAD TO BE SURE THAT THE COUNTRY'S INTERESTS ARE PROTECTED IN A NEW SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC COMMUNITY. HE OBSERVED THAT SUCH PROTECTION COULD BE OBTAINED BY HAVING ARTICLES INCLUDED IN THE FINAL TREATY WHICH GRANTED HONDURAS CERTAIN BENEFITS IN LIGHT OF ITS RELATIVELY UNDERDEVELOPED CONDITION IN RELATION TO THE OTHER CENTRAL AMERICAN COUNTRIES.

3. ELVIR SAID THAT ON MARCH 4-6 THE SUPERIOR DEFENSE COUNCIL HAD DISCUSSED THE DRAFT DECREE DESIGNED TO ESTABLISH THE ADVISORY COUNCIL. HE SAID THAT IT WAS STUDIED BY THE CHIEF OF STATE AND COUNCIL OF MINISTERS ON MARCH 9 (THE DECREE WAS APPROVED AND READ ON RADIO/TV THE EVENING OF MARCH 9). HE SAID THAT THE GOVERNMENT HOPES THE ADVISORY COUNCIL WILL PROMOTE A DIALOGUE AMONG ALL THE SECTORS OF HONDURAN SOCIETY. HE SAID THE FIRST ITEM OF SUBSTANTIVE IMPORTANCE FOR THE ADVISORY COUNCIL WILL BE THE PREPARATION OF THE ELECTORAL LAW.

4. ELVIR FELT THAT, BY AND LARGE, THE PUBLIC IMAGE OF THE ARMED FORCES IS GOOD. HE ALSO BELIEVES THAT GREATER STABILITY HAS DEVELOPED WITHIN THE MILITARY WITH THE PASSAGE OF TIME. HE EMPHASIZED THAT THE MILITARY

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LEADERS BELIEVE THAT THEY MUST MODERNIZE THEIR EQUIPMENT SO THAT THERE WILL NOT BE A REPETITION OF THEIR UNREADINESS WHEN ATTACKED IN 1969. HE SAID THAT THE PURPOSE OF BUILDING UP A STRONG AIR FORCE IS TO DETER A POSSIBLE ATTACK RATHER THAN TO BE A THREAT TO ANY COUNTRY.

5. BEGIN COMMENT: THE CONVERSATION WITH ELVIR ONCE AGAIN EMPHASIZES THE CONCERN HONDURAN MILITARY LEADERS FEEL

ABOUT THEIR RELATIVE POSITION VIS-A-VIS EL SALVADOR.
THEIR VIEW MAY NOT BE JUSTIFIED BUT IT EXISTS. THEIR
UNDERLYING PERCEPTION HAS UNDOUBTEDLY INFLUENCED THEM
IN THEIR DESIRE TO DEVELOP A POWERFUL AIR FORCE AS A
COUNTERWEIGHT TO WHAT THEY INTERPRET AS GENERAL SALVADORAN
MILITARY SUPERIORITY.
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